

Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Standards: What Parents Should Know



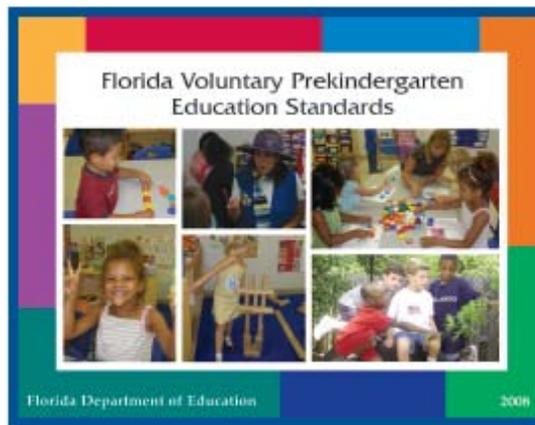
It's Okay to Play in VPK!

Introduction to the Standards

The Constitutional Amendment approved by Florida's voters in 2002 requires that a high quality prekindergarten learning opportunity be available to all four-year-old children in the state. The program is free and participation is voluntary. The implementing legislation required the Florida Department of Education (DOE) to adopt performance standards for children in the VPK Education Program. Performance standards are examples of the knowledge and skills that children should have by the end of their VPK year and are based on the way children naturally grow and develop.

In 2004, early childhood education experts reviewed the *Florida School Readiness Performance Standards (2002)* and developed a new set of standards called, the *Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Standards (2005)*. During this revision, specific emphasis was given to the area of Emergent Literacy. The State Board of Education approved the proposed standards in March 2005.

In 2007, the *Florida VPK Education Standards (2005)* were reviewed with specific emphasis given to the area of mathematics. As part of the revision, the *Cognitive Development and General Knowledge* domain in the *Florida VPK Education Standards (2005)* was separated into two domains, *Mathematical and Scientific Thinking* and *Social Studies and The Arts*. Benchmarks were added to the *Mathematical Thinking* component. The State Board of Education approved the revised standards in August 2008.



Purpose of this Flipbook

The *Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Standards (2008)* describe skills that four-year-old children should know and be able to do by the end of their VPK experience. Fully recognizing parents as their child's first teacher, this flipbook is designed to help families understand how these standards can help them create developmentally appropriate learning environments for children.

The parent flipbook, "It's Okay to Play in VPK," begins by describing the characteristics of developmentally appropriate learning environments. Then, it identifies how the VPK Education Standards can be used to help children of all different backgrounds, abilities, temperaments, and interests to learn and develop.

The flipbook also introduces the eight "domains" of development that are included in the VPK Education Standards.

- Physical Health
- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language and Communication
- Emergent Literacy
- Mathematical and Scientific Thinking
- Social Studies and The Arts
- Motor Development

For each domain, families will find examples of play activities that support children's development—not only in the classroom, but also in the home and in the community.

Developmentally Appropriate Learning Environments—Play with a Purpose!

Research shows that young children learn best through hands-on experiences that have been planned by knowledgeable teachers.

To parents, this may look like “just play,” but it is actually active learning. When young children explore things directly with their senses and practice new skills through play, they are learning in ways that are meaningful to them at their stage of development.

Here are some characteristics of a developmentally appropriate environment in VPK.

- The children look happy, healthy, and involved in activities.
- The prekindergarten teachers are friendly, kind, calm, and patient.
- The prekindergarten teachers get on the children’s eye level to listen, talk, and play with them.
- The prekindergarten teachers give individual attention to each child daily.
- There are various learning centers and play spaces available (e.g., dramatic play, art center, blocks, library, manipulative toys, music, sand/water tables).
- There are plenty of books, blocks, puzzles, toys, and materials for all the children in the class.
- The physical layout/classroom arrangement provides enough space for a variety of learning centers and activities.
- The daily schedule is well-planned and includes time for outdoor play and learning.
- The facility is cheerful, clean, and safe, and the equipment is in good repair.
- Instruction is linked to the *Florida VPK Education Standards*.

Using the Florida VPK Education Standards with Diverse Learners

The *Florida VPK Education Standards* were not developed to be “one size fits all.” Children learn at different rates and have different experiences, abilities, and interests. When adults understand and embrace these differences, trust develops, relationships grow, and healthy learning follows. Teachers must be aware of individual differences and respond to them in ways that will meet each child’s needs. This is especially true when the VPK classroom includes children with disabilities, children of different cultures and ethnicities, and children whose native language is not English.

Here are some strategies that should be used to support the growth and learning of all children in VPK and help them attain the *Florida VPK Education Standards* and be ready for kindergarten.

- Acknowledge that children can demonstrate their knowledge and abilities in many ways.
- Recognize that a child’s native language serves as a foundation for knowledge acquisition.
- Use the strengths and skills children already have as the starting point for new experiences and instruction. Build on what they know.
- Make sure that all children are included in group activities.
- Help children develop communication skills by using words along with gestures or actions. Use lots of repetition.
- Give all children many opportunities to participate, so their language and communication skills can develop.
- Add new activities and materials to meet specific needs of the children.
- Modify materials and activities so the children can participate as independently as possible.
- Use peers as models, helpers, and friends to provide praise and encouragement.
- Adapt the flow of the room, activity areas, and seating options to help all children to participate actively.



Physical Health

Physical health and learning go hand-in-hand. Physical health impacts every aspect of development. With their increased coordination, balance, and strength, four-year-old children are great explorers of their environments. They are able to accept learning challenges that were out of their reach just a few short months ago. When children are physically active and healthy, their social well-being is enhanced. By using their bodies to move, act, and react, children gain self-confidence. Their vision and hearing skills are refined in ways that facilitate language learning. They are also developing skills that enable them to be active partners in managing their health, safety, and physical fitness.

There are two main components of *Physical Health* in the *Florida VPK Education Standards*:

- Physical Health (e.g., dental care, nutritional choices)
- Knowledge of Wellness (e.g., following basic health and safety rules and habits).



Here are examples of activities that support children's physical health.

At Home

- Talk about the importance of brushing and flossing teeth and practice together.
- Encourage children to wash their hands often. Talk about how germs are spread and the impact germs have on us.
- While grocery shopping or fixing a snack, talk about choosing healthy, nutritious foods over unhealthy ones.
- Schedule regular well-child check-ups with a doctor or other health care provider.

During Outdoor Play

- Set up an obstacle course in the yard or on the playground for children to explore.
- Act out fire safety procedures (e.g., stop, drop, and roll).
- Create simple exercise routines with music.
- Increase outdoor time and decrease screen time (e.g., television, computer and video games).

In the Classroom

- Let children safely assist in preparing nutritious foods.
- Conduct regular fire and emergency drills.
- Plan and provide movement activities every day.

Approaches to Learning

Approaches to Learning is not about specific knowledge content or skills. It is about how the child learns new skills. Some four-year-olds seem to be bursting with the desire to explore and accept new challenges, while others need more structure and encouragement when trying new things. The role of teachers, parents, and other adults should be to provide opportunities for success. All children, regardless of learning style or special needs, can learn and be successful.

There are four main components of *Approaches to Learning* in the *Florida VPK Education Standards*:

- Eagerness and Curiosity (e.g., showing interest in stories, asking questions about how things work)
- Persistence (e.g., trying again and again to button a shirt)
- Creativity and Inventiveness (e.g., trying different ways of carrying a cup to keep it from spilling)
- Planning and Reflection (e.g., talking about plans to build a fort).

Here are examples of activities that encourage children to explore their environment and actively engage in learning.

At Home

- Ask questions that will encourage children to think, wonder, and ask more questions. Use open-ended questions that begin with who, what, when, where, why, or how, and that cannot be answered with just "yes" or "no."
- Include children in planning special events (e.g., birthday parties, family vacation, weekend activities).
- During dinner, in the car, or at bath time, provide opportunities for children to discuss and review what they did during their day.

During Outdoor Play

- Plan a project (e.g., woodworking or gardening) and ask children for input.
- Plan and build a fort in the yard or on the playground together.
- Introduce new equipment and materials and talk about the different ways they might be used.

In the Classroom

- Invite special guests and plan field trips based on children's interests.
- Offer various choices of learning centers and materials, and plenty of time for the children to become engaged.
- Change classroom activities and materials regularly to keep things interesting and encourage curiosity.

Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional readiness is critical to a child's successful transition to kindergarten. Young children who are able to understand and express their own feelings, understand the viewpoint and feelings of others, cooperate with peers and adults, and resolve conflicts, are more likely to be successful in school. Positive relationships with adults lead to positive relationships with peers.

Four-year-old children are developing important skills related to joining in conversations, asking questions, and listening to other people. They learn how to interact with a variety of people and in different situations.

There are five main components of *Social and Emotional Development* in the *Florida VPK Education Standards*:

- Self-Concept (e.g., being able to identify one's own characteristics and preferences)
- Self-Control (e.g., waiting patiently for a turn at the water fountain)
- Relationships with Adults (e.g., responding appropriately when an adult says "Good morning," or going to an adult for help when a friend falls and gets hurt)
- Relationships with Peers (e.g., talking with a friend to plan their play on the playground)
- Social Problem-Solving (e.g., asking an adult for help when another child keeps taking his or her toy).



Here are examples of activities that encourage children's social and emotional development.

At Home

- Support children when they make mistakes. Acknowledge their efforts (e.g., tell child, "I see you worked hard on that." or "You almost made it.").
- Model respect for others and good conversational skills like not interrupting others when they are speaking.
- Introduce children to other adults in the community.

During Outdoor Play

- Encourage friendships by setting up playground play-dates with other children.
- Encourage turn taking on outdoor equipment.
- Create activities that require children to work together in order to accomplish goals.
- Observe the children as they try to solve conflicts and provide modeling of appropriate resolution skills (e.g., "When you are frustrated/angry, tell your friend with words.")

In the Classroom

- Recognize and display children's art work.
- Follow a consistent daily routine so children know what to expect.

Language and Communication

When placed in environments that are rich in language, new experiences, and conversation, children develop skills in understanding what others say to them and in using spoken language to express their own ideas and experiences.

There are five main components of *Language and Communication* in the *Florida VPK Education Standards*:

- Listening—receptive language (e.g., listening to a story and showing that he or she understands it by pointing to a picture, answering a question, acting out the story)
- Speaking—expressive language (e.g., talking clearly enough for a visitor to understand)
- Vocabulary (e.g., knowing the names for objects, colors, foods, tools, body parts; using action words: skip, "roll," "throw"; using descriptive words: "small," "huge," "slow")
- Sentences and Structure (e.g., being able to ask questions and give answers using complete sentences)
- Conversation (e.g., introducing oneself to a new neighbor; looking at the person one is talking to; asking questions and then listening to the answers).

Here are examples of activities that encourage children's language and communication development.

At Home

- Ask children questions (e.g., "What was your favorite part of the day?" "What did you do at school?" "Whom did you play with?").
- Read stories to children and ask who, what, where, when, and why questions about the stories.
- Speak clearly, at a comfortable pace and an easily heard volume, inside and outdoors.

Language and Communication -continued-

During Outdoor Play

- Play Simon Says and scavenger hunt games using specific location, action, and descriptor words (e.g., behind the big red slide).
- Take children on field trips and to assemblies to create a social setting and give them a shared topic to discuss.
- Take children on nature walks and ask questions about what they see to get a conversation going.

In the Classroom

- Read concept-related books to the children.
- Engage children in conversation. Follow their lead in the conversation.
- When creating a bulletin board or mural for a new theme, label and discuss the meaning and function of the pictures and objects.

Emergent Literacy

Learning to read and learning to write are among children's most important achievements. These skills open the door to a world of learning, discovery, and creativity. Children who have early experiences with books and other forms of print (e.g., recipes and road signs) are more likely to come to school excited about learning to read and write.

There are two main components of *Emergent Literacy* in the *Florida VPK Education Standards*:

- Emergent Reading (e.g., the child enjoys being read to, understands that words are made up of different sounds, knows the names and sounds of letters)
- Emergent Writing (e.g., the child tries to write by scribbling, drawing, putting his or her name on pictures, trying to copy letters or numbers).

Here are examples of activities that support emergent literacy in children.

At Home

- Create comfortable, inviting spaces for reading. Provide good lighting, and make the space cozy by adding throw pillows, bean bag chairs, and a book basket.
- Model appropriate book handling on a daily basis by holding the books right side up and putting them back on the shelf or in the book basket.
- Play a clapping game with the children, clapping once while saying each syllable in children's names.
- Provide books that are at the appropriate reading level.

During Outdoor Play

- Provide dramatic play props (e.g., plastic dishes and food, red cloak, hats, pretend tools) for children to use when re-enacting a story.
- Encourage children to practice writing letters in the sand or dirt.

In the Classroom

- Provide written materials (e.g., menus, songs, signs, and charts) and show the children how they might be used.
- Encourage children to match magnetic letters to an alphabet chart attached to a magnetic board. Ask them to say each letter aloud as they make the match.
- Ask children to name the first letter in a word or to find a target letter when looking at books.



Mathematical and Scientific Thinking

Mathematical and Scientific Thinking involves the skills and strategies that children use to explore and learn about their world. Children begin to count, sort and manipulate sets of objects. Children also begin to identify and compare two- and three-dimensional shapes and to explore symmetry as they work with blocks and other concrete objects. The natural world and physical events are fascinating to four-year-old children. When adults respond to children's questions, inquisitiveness and scientific thinking are fostered.

There are two main components of *Mathematical and Scientific Thinking* in the *Florida VPK Education Standards*:

- Mathematical Thinking (e.g., figuring out how many plates are needed to set the table, sorting buttons by color or size)
- Scientific Thinking (e.g., taking apart a flashlight to see what is inside, using a whisk to whip up bubbles in a bowl, describing how things are the same or different).

The following are areas, more precise in organizing the types of skills to be learned, within *Mathematical and Scientific Thinking*.

Mathematical Thinking

- Number Sense – children use one-to-one correspondence, count and construct sets of objects, and understand whether two sets are equal or one set has more or less.
- Number and Operations – children begin manipulating sets of numbers (e.g., combining sets of concrete objects and taking objects away from a set).
- Patterns and Seriation – children recognize and create patterns, as well as order objects in a series (seriation).
- Geometry – children begin to recognize, manipulate, and compare two- and three-dimensional shapes that are common in their world, using a variety of concrete objects. Children also explore symmetry as they work with blocks and other concrete objects.
- Spatial Relations – children begin to understand and describe their world as they become more proficient in relating to others.
- Measurement – children begin to understand and make sense of their world as they compare quantities using length, weight, and height and represent and analyze data.

Scientific Thinking

- Inquiry – children ask questions, use simple tools, and make comparisons.

Here are examples of activities that support children's mathematical and scientific thinking.

At Home

- Incorporate math into everyday activities (e.g., counting body parts, how many places to set at the dinner table, counting as high as possible before the traffic light changes from red to green).
- Provide supervised opportunities to examine how tools work (e.g., looking at and discussing pulleys, taking apart broken appliances).
- With close supervision, involve children in the meaningful use of household tools (e.g., eggbeaters, magnets on the refrigerator, funnels).

During Outdoor Play

- Go on a nature walk to collect leaves, rocks, and other items, calling children's attention to patterns and shapes in nature.
- Create obstacle courses that require moving in different directions and locations.
- Teach songs, games, dances, and chants that include position words (e.g., up, down, over, and around).

In the Classroom

- Provide one-to-one matching activities (e.g., pegs and peg boards, nuts and bolts).
- Label shapes in the classroom and describe how they are the same and different.
- Use charts to order, compare, and describe objects.



Social Studies and The Arts

Prekindergarten children demonstrate knowledge of social studies by identifying attributes of familiar people and understanding family roles and relationships. They are developing new ways of examining and noticing places and the environment. Group rules are becoming easier to understand and follow, and four-year-old children have a beginning understanding of leadership.



The arts provide children with opportunities to express ideas and feelings, use words, manipulate tools and media, and solve problems. Through the arts, children learn to express what they know, pursue their own interests and abilities, and appreciate the contributions of others. They begin to understand that others can be creative in different ways and show appreciation for these differences by asking questions and commenting.

There are two main components of *Social Studies and The Arts* in the *Florida VPK Education Standards*:

- Social Studies (e.g., pretending to be workers: fire fighters, cooks, truck drivers, teachers; talking about the ways family members are related; and noticing similarities and differences between people in how they look or speak)
- The Arts (e.g., experimenting with play dough by rolling it, cutting it, or forming it into an object; singing along with the radio or making up songs; dancing or moving to music; using different voices to tell a story).

The following are areas, more precise in organizing the types of skills to be learned, within *Social Studies and The Arts*.

Social Studies

- People, Past and Present – children identify attributes of familiar people and understand family roles and relationships.
- Human Interdependence – children develop new ways of examining and noticing places and the environment, including understanding family needs, roles and relationships; people's jobs and what is required to perform them; and being aware of technology and how it affects life.
- Citizenship and Government – children have a beginning understanding of leadership and group rules are becoming easier to understand and follow.
- People and Where They Live – children begin to show awareness of their environment.

The Arts

- Expression and Representation – children begin to understand that others can be creative in different ways, use a variety of art materials for creative expression, participates in creative movement, dance and drama, and show appreciation for these differences by asking questions and commenting.
- Understanding and Appreciation – children learn to express what they know, pursue their own interests and abilities, and appreciate the contributions of others.

Here are examples of activities that support children understanding of social studies and the arts.

At Home

- Ask children to dance or move to different tempos and styles of music (e.g., classical, rock, and jazz).
- Introduce new scientific tools (e.g., thermometers and calculators) and discuss who might use them for their job.
- Allow children to use markers, chalk, finger paint, etc., to express themselves.
- Play different types of music in the CD player on the ride to and from school and sing song in the car.
- Encourage children to participate in family chores (e.g., matching socks from the laundry).

During Outdoor Play

- Discuss with children reasons for not picking flowers while on a nature walk.
- Assist children as they follow a simple treasure hunt map on the playground.
- Ask children what the rules on the playground are and why the rules are important.

In the Classroom

- Make family trees to show similarities and differences in family structure.
- Encourage children to ask questions about other families (e.g., how they celebrate holidays, who goes to work).
- Work with children to place pictures of common household items in the proper rooms of a house plan and allow children explain why they go there.
- Provide display space to introduce and examine artistic creations and events.

Motor Development

Four-year-old children love to move, and their increasing coordination and motor skills open up new opportunities for active exploration of their environment. Research and experience confirm that free play alone is not sufficient for the development of physical skills; planned movement activities are needed. Exposure to many different types of movements should be the goal, rather than high performance in particular skills.

There are two main components of *Motor Development* in the *Florida VPK Education Standards*:

- Gross Motor (e.g., balance, control, coordination of movements by the body's large muscles)
- Fine Motor (e.g., strength and control; eye-hand coordination; control of writing, drawing, and art tools).

Here are examples of activities that support children's motor development.

At Home

- Provide daily unstructured times for physical activities (e.g., going on a bike ride, kicking a ball back and forth, taking a walk).
- Provide children with opportunities to use a variety of tools (e.g., writing tools, tongs, egg beaters, screwdriver).
- Display children's writing and artwork on the fridge or display board, or frame as gifts for relatives.

During Outdoor Play

- Include children in playground clean-up tasks.
- Play games that involve kicking a ball with a two-step start.
- Allow children to practice riding a tricycle around the yard or playground.

In the Classroom

- Provide planned movement activities that use early skills to build up to more complex movement tasks.
- Display and store materials so that children have easy access and choice and can put things away independently.
- Provide a variety of materials for children to practice zipping, snapping, buttoning, and tying.



Parent Information

VPK Contacts	
Responsibilities	Organization
<p>Approved Curricula for Low Performing Providers DOE Approved Trainings Offered Throughout the State Professional Development and Articulation The Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS) Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Standards VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate Web Site VPK Provider Readiness Rate Dispute Process VPK Regional Facilitator Contact Information</p>	<p>Florida Department of Education Office of Early Learning (850) 245-0445 1-866-447-1159 EarlyLearning@fldoe.org</p> <p>Office: http://www.fldoe.org/earlylearning</p> <p>VPK Provider Kindergarten Readiness Rate: https://vpk.fldoe.org/</p> <p>Bright Beginnings: http://www.brightbeginningsfl.org</p>
<p>Child Care Executive Partnership Child Care Resource & Referral Program Early Learning Coalition System Florida's Early Learning Advisory Council Low Performing Providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VPK Low Performing Provider Improvement Process • Completing/submitting Low Performing Provider Improvement Plan & Periodic Progress <p>Quality Initiative Trainings and Workgroups School Readiness Program Warm Line/Inclusion Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility and enrollment • Payments to providers • Monitoring of programs 	<p>Agency for Workforce Innovation Office of Early Learning (850) 921-3180 1-866-357-3239 AWI_comments@flaawi.com</p> <p>Child Care: http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/index.html</p> <p>VPK: http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/VPK%20Program.html</p> <p>Local Early Learning Coalition: http://www.floridajobs.org/VPK/CoalitionInfo.aspx</p>
<p>Child Care Licensing Florida Child Care Professional Credential (FCCPC) Registering for VPK Related Trainings VPK Training Requirements</p>	<p>Department of Children and Families Child Care Office (850) 488-4900</p> <p>Office: http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/childcare/</p> <p>Local Contact: http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/childcare/dcfspecialiststc.shtml</p>
<p>Enrolling a Child in VPK Local Training Opportunities</p>	<p>Your Local Early Learning Coalition http://www.floridajobs.org/VPK/CoalitionInfo.aspx</p>

Online Resources

Bright Beginnings: Resources and strategies designed to help parents get involved in their child's education.
<http://www.brightbeginningsfl.org/Parent/Default.aspx>

Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL): Promotes the adoption and sustained use of evidence-based early literacy learning practices by early childhood intervention practitioners, parents, and other caregivers of young children.
<http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org>

Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children: Promotes policies and advances evidence-based practices that support families and enhance the optimal development of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities.
<http://www.dec-sped.org>

Early Childhood: Where Learning Begins: Mathematical activities for parents and their 2- to 5-year-old children.
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/EarlyMath/title.html>

Get Ready to Read!: Provides an easy-to-administer, research-based screening tool to early childhood educators, child care providers, and parents in order to help them prepare all children to learn to read and write.
<http://www.getreadytoread.org>

Helping Your Child Learn Math: Resource for parents to help their children learn math in everyday events.
<http://www.math.com/parents/articles/helpmath.html>

Just Read, Florida! The statewide reading initiative that prioritizes reading in Florida's public schools and among all the community groups and volunteer organizations that support them.
<http://www.justreadflorida.com/>

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): Focuses on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age eight. <http://naeyc.org>

National Center for Early Development and Learning: Focuses on enhancing the cognitive, social and emotional development of children from birth through age eight. <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl>

National Center for Learning Disabilities: Promotes high quality early education services and supports all children, including those who struggle with learning.
<http://www.nclld.org>

PBSparents: Child development tracker with a list of general goals for children ages 4-5 to be prepared for kindergarten.
<http://www.pbs.org/parents/childdevelopment>

Zero to Three: Supports the healthy development and well-being of infants, toddlers, and their families.
<http://www.zerotothree.org>



Florida Department of Education
Dr. Eric J. Smith



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